

Chapter 3: Screening SROs

As with many occupations, ***the qualifications and the personality of the SRO are likely to make or break the program*** according to most of the program participants interviewed for this report. As a result, they say, the single most important component of an SRO program may be staffing it properly by ***(1) developing written criteria for selecting qualified officers and then (2) carefully screening applicants using these criteria.***

Screening Criteria

There are two types of criteria for selecting SROs: essential criteria that all programs should apply to all candidates and optional criteria that some programs may wish to adopt.

Apply Eight Essential Criteria to Every Candidate

Program personnel largely agree that only officers who meet the following eight criteria should be selected as SROs:

- (1) ***likes kids***, cares about and wants to work with kids, and is able to work with kids;
- (2) has the ***right demeanor and "people skills,"*** including good communication skills;
- (3) ***has experience*** as a patrol officer or road deputy;
- (4) is able to work ***independently*** with little supervision;
- (5) is exceptionally ***dependable***;
- (6) is willing to ***work very hard***;
- (7) is—or can become—***an effective teacher***, and
- (8) has above average ***integrity***.

Programs should apply these criteria to each candidate for every SRO position regardless of the school's grade level, size, student body, and culture, or other considerations.

That said, when no one or only one or two eligible officers apply for the position (for example, in very small agencies), departments may not be able to require candidates to meet all these criteria because the applicant pool is too small. For example, one program supervisor said that, when there are not a lot of applicants for the opening, he accepts a young officer without the required patrol experience if the officer really wants to work with kids.

In other cases, officers who do not meet all the criteria can still become effective SROs ***if the program trains them thoroughly before (or shortly after) they go on the job***—and then supervises them closely. The matrix below indicates the characteristics every SRO should have *before* being accepted for the position and those characteristics that are also necessary but which training *before (or shortly after) going on the job*, followed by close supervision, *may* be able to instill in them. However, a better approach is to improve the recruitment process, as discussed in the previous chapter, so that additional officers who have all these qualifications apply for the position.

Criteria Applicants Must Meet Before They Are Selected as SROs Versus Criteria They Can Meet Afterwards With Training and Supervision	
Absolute Requirements	Attitudes and Skills That Can Be Taught or Instilled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wants to work with kids • has the right demeanor and "people skills" • has experience as a patrol officer • has above average integrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is able to work independently • is exceptionally dependable • is willing to work very hard • is able to teach

The text below discusses the rationale for applying these eight screening criteria.

(1) ***Likes kids, cares about and wants to work with kids, and is able to work with kids***

Not surprisingly, everyone we interviewed agreed that this is the single most essential qualification for becoming an SRO. However, some program participants emphasized that wanting to work with kids is not good enough—SROs have to be able to work with kids. John Morella, an SRO with the West Orange, New Jersey, Police Department, tied the need to be able to work with kids back to one of his department's objectives for the program: "You have to like and care about kids—the whole idea of the program is to break down barriers between cops and kids."

Some supervisors take into consideration whether a candidate has children of his or her own because they consider this an indication that the person may be "child centered" and because parents have presumably learned how to communicate with kids. As Kiel Higgins, an SRO in Albuquerque, New Mexico, said, "It's a plus [in being an effective SRO] if you have kids of your own."

(2) ***Has the right demeanor and "people skills," and good communication skills***

Program participants agree that SROs need three types of related personality traits and skills in terms of to how they interact with other people. First, SROs need ***the right demeanor***, including being:

- ***calm*** or having an even temperament (not yelling or overreacting);
- ***approachable*** (not intimidating or aloof—see the box "SROs Have to Be Approachable");
- ***able to put up gracefully with kids' foolish talk and nonsense*** (not getting defensive); and
- ***patient*** (not getting exasperated and annoyed).

At times, having the right demeanor requires SROs to exercise a great deal of self restraint:

- Cynthia Celandier, an assistant principal in Marshall, Minnesota: "SROs need a sense of humor and should not take kids' comments personally. SROs can't overreact to every little thing kids say; SROs need a sense of balance."
- Sergeant Paul Marchand, the program supervisor with the Salem, New Hampshire, Police Department: "SROs are a special breed; you have to take a lot of guff. You need a temperament that doesn't get easily fired up and has patience."

SROs need to have the proper demeanor not only to accomplish their mission with kids but also because the officers are highly visible when they perform their jobs: "Demeanor—this is important," the Oklahoma County program supervisor in the sheriff's office, Sergeant Rochelle Thompson, said, "because SROs are constantly in the community's eyes in dealing with their kids."

SROs Have to Be Approachable

Many program participants make clear that SROs who maintain the stereotypical authoritarian "cop" demeanor in dealing with the public will not succeed as SROs unless they change their behavior.

- Kiel Higgins, SRO, Albuquerque, New Mexico: "A lot of cops are stern and abrupt and harsh; SROs need to be caring to work with kids."
- Steve Malisos, Salem, New Hampshire, SRO: "They can't act like a cop—you can't be Mr. Authority. The students will not open up to you, thereby jeopardizing a valuable information resource."

One reason SROs need to avoid being distant or harsh with students is that the officers' encounters with kids are typically not one-time occurrences. SRO Derrick Berry with the Palm Beach County, Florida, School District Police Department said, "The most common problem with new SROs is that, on the road, they deal with a situation and leave and never see the person again. But kids come back to school the next day, so SROs need to talk and carry through with them on an ongoing basis. They have to be delicate, not blunt."

A major complement to having the right demeanor to work with kids is the ability to work with school administrators. Why?

- Most principals consider their schools to be their domain.
- School administrators generally see their role as one of ensuring the education of their students and tend to regard the police officer role as one of punishment.
- SROs work on a daily, even hourly, basis with school administrators.

As a result, SROs need (1) tact, (2) persistence, and (3) flexibility to be able to work with principals and assistant principals who may be reluctant to share authority with anyone or simply concerned initially about sharing control with "a cop."

Closely related to being able to work well with administrators is the importance of functioning as a team player rather than—as SROs were used to doing on patrol—"running the show" by themselves. As Detective John Jameson, a former SRO in Schaumburg, Illinois, said, "You have to be a team player. You have to be comfortable with school administrators and teachers and support staff. Cops usually deal with things on the street entirely on their own; in schools, you have to work with other people."

Being a Team Player Does Not Mean Always Giving In

Being a team player does not mean the SRO must always accede to the wishes of others. SROs must also be able to be firm when the need arises. As Glenn Brunet, an SRO in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, made clear, "The SRO needs to be kind but will stand his ground when he needs to." Brunet, after obtaining his supervisor's approval, once had to threaten to arrest a principal for interfering with a police officer in the performance of his duty when the administrator was physically barring Brunet from arresting a student.

SROs also need to be able to ***deal with parents*** in a variety of situations. Cynthia Celandier, assistant principal in Marshall, pointed out several types of interactions SROs need to be able to have with parents:

- "Being able to communicate with parents to diffuse tense situations and present sensitive issues that can mortify them." (Her SRO found two students having sex in a car on a side street and called their parents after bringing the students to Celandier.)
- "Explaining how parents can cope with legal consequences of their kids' behavior, and knowing what programs and other resources are available to help them and their children."

(3) Has experience as a patrol officer or road deputy

Almost every program assigns as SROs only officers who have spent at least a few years on the road. For example, the Tucson, Arizona, Police Department requires SROs to have three years of continuous service with the department. This experience is important for a number of reasons.

- Glenn Brunet, an SRO in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, said, "You can't assign rookies as SROs because the kids will test you, and SROs need answers. You need at least 2-3 years' experience on patrol handling calls on the street because . . . you get experience dealing with people in crisis."
- According to a former Tucson program supervisor, SRO applicants need patrol experience in part "so that they've seen what it's like to get hassled by the public and be able to respond appropriately."
- John Morella, an SRO in West Orange, added that SROs "need a few years' experience on the road so they understand the workings of the police department, because kids inquire about what it's like to be a cop or ask for advice."

Programs should not only require SROs to have spent time in patrol but **to have done well** on patrol—as Sergeant Jerry Thommes, the program supervisor in Schaumburg, Illinois, said, "You want SROs who were *good cops*. For example, they know how to investigate a case and write a good report."

One program supervisor believes that correctional officers with no policing experience can make excellent SROs and can perform even better than experienced patrol officers or road deputies (see the box "A Dissenting Opinion About the Need for Policing Experience"). While this was a minority view and applies of course only to programs run by sheriff's departments that operate a jail, in some respects seasoned correctional officers have had important relevant experience that patrol officers have not gone through, including taking constant guff day in and day out, learning to live and communicate with the same people every shift, and working cooped up all day in the same building.

(4) Is able to work independently

While most patrol officers function largely without direct supervision and separated from other patrol officers, ***SROs are particularly isolated***. In part, they are out of sight (literally—inside the school building) and therefore out of mind. Usually, they do not even appear for roll call. They are also isolated from the department inasmuch as their direct (if unofficial) supervisor for day-by-day activity is a principal or assistant principal, not the police or sheriff's department SRO supervisor. As a result, ***SROs must be capable of—and comfortable with—working alone, with minimal contact with the department***.

Program participants used different terminology to describe this needed trait, including being "proactive," "self-motivated," and a "self-starter," and "taking the initiative" to do what is needed.

- Sergeant Richard Davies, former SRO, Pine Bluff, Arkansas: "[You need] someone who needs little supervision—not someone who is going to pick up the phone all the time to ask the sergeant, 'I have a suicidal kid, should I call in mental health?' Of course you do."
- Sergeant Dennis Bogdan, program supervisor, West Orange: "They need maturity and reliability, because they receive less supervision than patrol officers do; they need to be able to handle tasks on their own. They must also be self-starters. Supervisors can't monitor them every hour of the day."

A Dissenting Opinion About the Need for Policing Experience

Sergeant Rochelle Thompson, supervisor of the Oklahoma County program, argues that correctional officers with no police experience make better SROs than do seasoned patrol officers. Indeed, most SROs in the Oklahoma County program have had no experience on the streets but have been hired directly from the jail where they have been correctional officers (or, in a few cases, from the court where they have provided security).

"This has worked wonders," Thompson said. "A lot of seasoned patrol officers are reactive to 911 and dispatch, and have been trained that way, but we want proactive SROs who prevent misconduct. The new cop is more open to change because he doesn't have the ingrained reactive mentality from the street; instead, he will bend more with administrators, be more flexible, and strive to understand the education system. In fact, when a position opens up, no road deputies apply, perhaps because they see it as being a 'Kiddie Cop' position."

"Correctional officers also make better SROs than road deputies," Thompson continues, "because they have learned how to communicate with inmates; outnumbered and unarmed, they can't simply force inmates to behave. As a result, they have to fall back on persuasion, mediation, and 'verbal judo' rather than what most police officers resort to on the streets when there is trouble—force."

During the summer and Christmas break, the former correctional officers, now new SROs, go on patrol with experienced road deputies to get trained. They are also scheduled to attend the 16-week Council of Law Enforcement and Education Training (CLEET) academy to become sworn officers.

Coincidentally, Maury County Sheriff Enoch George in Tennessee voiced a similar perspective. Enoch said that he sees a difference in the new SROs who are coming off the street as patrol deputies compared with new SROs who have been correctional officers because "patrol officers have a more difficult time adapting to the school environment."

(5) Is exceptionally dependable

The principal aspect to being dependable is always showing up at school. One of the top 2 of 17 "important characteristics of an SRO" that planners of the Stark County, Ohio, program identified is dependability—for example, "not taking too many sick days." Other program participants confirm the importance of this trait.

- Christopher Renouf, principal, Sarasota County, Florida: "Kids want to see that the SRO will be there [in school] regularly."
- Sergeant Richard Davies: Applicants have to have "an above average attendance record—SROs have to be in school."

A second aspect to "dependability" is that SROs need to **follow through with what they say they will do**, especially with kids. According to Sergeant Richard Davies, "SROs have to take kids' concerns seriously and follow up on them."

(6) Is willing to work very hard

If SROs are not working very hard—even in schools with very few crimes—they are not doing their job. As one supervisor said, "They have to be willing to work hard—cops are lazy, but you have to spend time on this job."

Because they have to work so hard, **SROs need good organizational skills**—they need to be able to manage their time well. Lieutenant Chris Hagwood of the Garner Police Department in North Carolina pointed out that "the multiple demands placed on SROs from teachers, principals, and the department can be difficult for some officers to manage." A program administrator with the Palm Beach County School District Police Department said his most difficult supervisory responsibility is stressing time management to SROs. For example, one SRO's only weakness is not getting memos done on time. Because the SRO failed to submit a report on time, the chief was uninformed about an incident when the media questioned him. As a result, SROs need to be able to "multi-task", but also establish priorities for what they will do first, what they will leave until later, and what they will have to tell people they cannot get to at all.

As a result of these competing demands, being an effective SRO requires **being flexible—having the ability to "switch gears" quickly from one thing to another**. As Christopher Renouf, an elementary school principal in Sarasota County, said, "Especially at the elementary level, you have to keep stopping what you're doing to attend to something else."

(7) Is—or can become—an effective teacher

The Delaware State Police program requires candidates to already be certified as instructors in order to become an SRO. Officers who have been teaching the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) or Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) curriculum before they become SROs have a significant head start in becoming effective teachers.

However, most SROs in the study began working in the schools knowing little or nothing about how to teach. Fortunately, some SROs report, this is a skill they can learn with little permanent damage to the program after they have begun working in the schools ***if not too many weeks go by before they receive training*** (see chapter 5, "Training SROs").

(8) Has above average integrity

All law enforcement officers should have above average integrity. However, several program participants suggested that ***SROs have to have even higher ethical standards than other police officers*** because they are mentoring kids.

- Christopher Renouf, elementary school principal, Sarasota County: "You have to walk the walk—if you preach to kids, you have to role model what you preach to them and to parents—you have to be a very ethical, moral person."
- Sergeant Richard Davies, former SRO in Pine Bluff: "An SRO has to have above average morals because of the potential for complicated relationships with kids. Kids are very vulnerable to innuendo; little girls love attention. So you have to be on automatic pilot to make sure that nothing suggestive is said or done and that any advances are firmly and immediately rejected."

Another aspect of having integrity is treating students in a consistent manner. Patrol officers enjoy tremendous discretion in terms of whether and how they sanction offenders. For example, depending on a number of factors, when a driver runs a red light an officer can ignore it, give a verbal reprimand, give a written warning, issue a citation, or arrest the person for reckless endangerment. However, SROs effectiveness' will be impaired if they treat students in an apparently inconsistent manner. As SRO Jim Marshall said, "SROs have to have the ability to be fair and consistent. Marshall is a small community, so I know a lot of parents. Some ask for favors—for example, 'Cut my kid some slack.' But I tell them I have to be consistent [in how I treat the kids]."

Additional Criteria Some Programs Use

Several programs use additional criteria for selecting SROs (see the box "Optional Criteria for Selecting SROs"), the most common of which are familiarity with juvenile law, good report writing skills, some college experience, and ties to the local community.

Finally, a few programs make a point of preferring SROs who are relatively young—typically, in their twenties or early thirties—under the assumption that they and the students will be able to relate to each other better than older SROs can. However, SROs in their forties and even fifties were observed interacting very effectively with kids. Furthermore, while SROs and students who are closer in age may have more rapport, older SROs have developed a maturity that in many ways makes them superior to younger SROs in terms of their roles as enforcers of the law, counselors, and mentors. Sergeant Richard Davies in Pine Bluff remarked, "You need maturity [to be an SRO]. You can't throw a 21-year old cop into the schools—he's still in the dating pool."

In addition, older SROs have often been through the stresses and rewards of raising children—and discovered first hand the best ways of handling kids. They also understand how children with apparently serious problem behaviors often "outgrow" or overcome them with proper parenting and mentoring. Finally, most older officers have outgrown the "John Wayne syndrome" of resorting initially to the use of force and getting excited about sirens and flashing lights.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, a few programs appoint officers who are nearing retirement or have already retired. In most cases, programs have found that this is not a wise choice. On the one hand, officers who are about to retire may simply go through the motions of being SROs because they want a "cushy" position until they qualify for their pension. On the other hand, retired officers often lack the motivation to fulfill the strenuous responsibilities because they often want the money that goes with being rehired.

Optional Criteria for Selecting SROs

Some programs use additional criteria for selecting SROs, but typically these criteria are more of a "wish list" that departments add to the essential criteria.

Knows the law as it relates to juveniles and schools

SROs need to have a firm grasp of their legal authority and the schools' powers in dealing with students, especially in such areas as search and seizure on school grounds and questioning students without parents present. As a result, the Scottsdale, Arizona, Police Department requires applicants to take a written examination on juvenile crime and investigations. However, many program supervisors and SROs in the study feel that applicants already know the law or can learn it before or just after going on the job.

Has good report writing skills

According to James Kelly, chief of the Palm Beach County School District Police Department, "Writing skills are especially important in an educational environment where people know what good writing is and the first thing they look at is format, writing ability, etc., not content. Most people see what you wrote, not who you are." In addition, supervisors do not want to keep asking SROs to rewrite their incident reports.

Has some college experience

A few programs favor candidates with at least some college experience. According to Chief Robert Yant in Marshall, "If you're dealing with a school environment, it's a help. In an educational environment dealing with school personnel who have B.A. degrees, the SRO needs excellent written and verbal skills. So we treated it like a 'veteran's preference' and offered five extra points to candidates who had a bachelor's degree." The Tucson program gives preference to candidates with some college education because, according to a former supervisor, "that means they are connected to education, and the SROs' work is prevention more than anything else."

Has ties to the local community

In some programs, the SROs were students of the principals in whose schools they are currently working. In others, they went to school with many of the students' parents. This familiarity with the school and community facilitated the officers' efforts to establish credibility and rapport—and secure in-kind contributions to the program.

- While administrators and teachers in a small program in Kentucky opposed having an armed officer in their school, their familiarity with and respect for the SRO—who had attended the school—helped allay their concerns.
- Glenn Brunet, who grew up in Terrebonne Parish, calls on friends in the local media to give the school positive publicity by taking and publishing photos of the cheerleaders and writing favorable articles about the school.

Commit Selection Criteria to Paper

Most of the 34 programs included in the study do not have written criteria for who can qualify as an SRO. Several program participants report that this is a mistake. Without written criteria, different people involved in deciding whom to approve as SROs may apply different—even contradictory—criteria.

In addition, *candidates* need to have the criteria provided to them in writing, not just verbally. For the program's pilot year in Schaumburg, Illinois, some candidates volunteered because they expected the job to be easy and liked the hours. Since then, fewer officers have applied for the assignment because they now know not only by word of mouth but also from the written selection criteria that SROs are required to do extensive teaching and work one-on-one with students—responsibilities some of them do not want to assume. As a result, only four officers applied when one SRO's tour expired in 2002.

The Screening Process

Screening is an attempt to determine whether applicants for a position meet the criteria for successful job performance. ***Without careful screening, departments may assign inappropriate officers to the schools who may not only be ineffective but also, several programs reported, hamper or set back the program for months and even years to come.***

However, it is not always easy to determine whether applicants meet the job criteria. The matrix below suggests which parts of the screening process SRO programs can use to help determine whether candidates meet each criterion.

Screening Approaches That Target Each Criterion	
Criterion	Applicable Screening Approaches
(1) Likes kids, cares about and wants to work with kids, and is able to work with kids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memorandum or letter of interest • explanation of expectations of the position • personnel files • personal experience with the candidate • oral interview panel
(2) Has the right demeanor and people skills, including good communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memorandum or letter of interest • personal experience with the candidate • oral interview panel • conversation with candidate's supervisor
(3) Has experience as a patrol officer or road deputy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversation with candidate's supervisor • personnel records
(4) Is able to work independently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversation with candidate's supervisor • explanation of expectations for the position • oral interview panel
(5) Is exceptionally dependable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversation with candidate's supervisor • explanation of expectations for the position • personnel files (history of sick time usage)
(6) Is willing to work very hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memorandum or letter of interest • explanation of expectations for the position • personnel files • conversation with candidate's supervisor • oral interview panel • report of having shadowed an SRO to learn the nature of the work
(7) Is—or can become—an effective teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memorandum or letter of interest • explanation of expectations for the position • personnel files • personal experience with the candidate • oral interview panel
(8) Has above average integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personnel files: record of citizen and internal complaints • explanation of expectations for the position • conversation with candidate's supervisor

Use Multiple Screening Procedures

Some programs rely on just one step to screen applicants, but most programs use two or more of the following approaches:

- require a memorandum of interest;
- talk with current and previous supervisors;
- inform candidates of the expectations for—and drawbacks to—the position;
- examine personnel files; and
- factor in personal experience with the candidate.

In general, ***the more procedures a program implements, the more likely it will identify well-qualified candidates.***

Require a Memorandum of Interest

Most programs require applicants to submit a memorandum or letter of interest when applying for the position. Applicants to the Tucson program must submit a memo of interest that addresses their:

- interest in working with youth;
- previous assignments or experiences that demonstrate their suitability for the assignment;
- public speaking experience;
- willingness to work flexible hours; and
- knowledge of the SRO program.

The Fontana, California, program requires a memo of interest that includes:

- number of years the candidate has been in law enforcement;
- number of years with the department;
- any noteworthy achievements as a law enforcement officer;
- prior work history with children;
- volunteer work with the community; and
- letters of recommendation from community members.

Talk With Current and Previous Supervisors

Most programs contact each applicant's current and sometimes previous supervisor. In most departments, especially smaller ones, supervisors get to know which officers have at least some of the characteristics needed to become an effective SRO.

Inform Candidates of the Expectations for—and Drawbacks to—the Position

An SRO with the Delaware State Police program pointed out that "it is important that the department be clear about the job expectations when selecting SROs so that applicants know what they will be responsible for before they come on board." This includes informing them about work conditions that they may find objectionable, for example, he says, telling them if they will be required frequently to cover after-school activities.

The following are among the other important drawbacks that programs should warn applicants about:

- the need to overcome fears about standing in front of a classroom;
- having to adjust to the personality and wishes of the school principal and assistant principal;
- working harder than they ever thought they would;
- living with the jokes and even scorn from some beat officers who consider them "Kiddie Cops"; and
- being isolated from the rest of the department.

Few programs provide all of this information. However, ***informing candidates about these potential drawbacks can help weed out inappropriate officers.*** Lieutenant Greg Harrison of Lenoir County, North Carolina, reported that "patrol deputies think the SRO assignment is 'a piece of cake' and are surprised when I tell them what they will have to do in the schools which often dissuades them from applying."

Examine Personnel and Other Files

A candidate's personnel files can tell a great deal about an officer's or deputy's suitability to be an SRO.

- Sergeant Lowell Rademacher, program supervisor (now retired), Marshall: "I looked at whether candidates added to their mandatory training on their own. Jim [Marshall, the SRO] had been to other courses at his own request and it wasn't a one-time flash in the pan."
- Sergeant Jerry Thommes, program supervisor, Schaumburg: "I check on whether they took courses in juvenile law on their own or were involved with kids on their own in Explorer Post or coaching, or have been a D.A.R.E. officer."

Supervisors in most programs verify whether the candidate has had any disciplinary actions over a specified period of time.

- The Jefferson City, Missouri, program guide specifies that "The officer shall not have any disciplinary action resulting in at least a minimum suspension during the previous twelve (12) months."
- The Boone Police Department in North Carolina requires that candidates have no suspensions or disciplinary actions within the past two years, and no written reprimands within the past six months.

Factor in Personal Experience With the Candidates

Sometimes personal experience plays a legitimate part in an SRO's selection. A school board member and former classroom teacher in one site had seen one of the candidates teach a D.A.R.E. class that her daughter was in. "I saw ----- work with kids and saw the rapport he has with them." As a result, she suggested to the superintendent of schools that this applicant be picked as the SRO.

Check for Signs of Enthusiasm for the Position

Finally, a common unstated criterion for the position is the candidate's enthusiasm for the job. Program personnel usually look for this trait during the individual or panel interview (see below). But another measure of candidates' seriousness that the Sarasota County program uses is whether applicants have gone to the trouble to shadow an SRO to gain an understanding of the position. Some candidates on their own also make an appointment to talk with program supervisors about the job. Precisely "to get a leg up on the interview process." When (now) Major Skip Rossi with the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office applied for the position, he made an appointment in advance to meet with the assistant superintendent who would be on

his review panel. (For a dissenting view on this approach, see the Garner, North Carolina, case study at the end of the chapter.)

Convene an Oral Interview Board or Panel

A number of programs assemble a panel of individuals to interview each candidate. Proponents of oral boards say the panels can usually reveal more than one-on-one interviews because they provide an opportunity to assess the candidate's oral communication skills, motivation, and composure under pressure. Kathleen Weigel, a high school principal in Palm Beach County, also points out that "there is some advantage to having several people participating in the interview because they pick up on different things applicants say or do—body language."

The discussion below addresses the issues involved in using an oral interview board. The case studies of the Garner, North Carolina, and Sarasota County, Florida, programs at the end of the chapter describe in detail how two programs make use of panels.

Who Sits on the Board

At a minimum, boards include one or more program first-line supervisors and another member of the department, such as the commander of the unit in which the program is housed. Because the program was new, the interview panel in Marshall included not only the sergeant who would become responsible for supervising the new SRO but also the sergeant who coordinated the SRO program in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Including a current SRO on the board can be especially helpful if none of the other panelists has ever been an SRO. As an SRO with the Delaware State Police said, "an SRO on the board knows what it takes to do the job" and can evaluate candidates with this in mind. When its program was just beginning in 1988, the Maury County Sheriff's Department in Tennessee included an SRO from a neighboring county on its panel.

A few programs expand the types of individuals who participate in the screening process. In Garner, officers who apply for a position are interviewed by a community panel that includes a parent of a child at the school. To gain community support for the program, Marshall Police Chief Robert Yant included a paralegal with the city attorney's office who was also a graduate of the citizen's academy; a business professor from the local state university; and a mid-manager from the town's largest employer. Finally, interview panels in most programs include school administrators (see the discussion below, "Involve School Administrators").

Questions Board Members Ask

Most programs that use oral panels rely on previously prepared written questions. As the box "Sample Oral Panel Interview Questions" suggests, questions commonly focus on the following areas:

- motivations for applying for the position;
- understanding the role and responsibilities of an SRO;
- an explanation of why the candidate would be effective in the position;
- previous experience relevant to the position, including working with youngsters and having given verbal presentations or taught classes;
- understanding community policing and its application in the school setting;
- experience working with little direct supervision;
- willingness to work overtime, including some evenings and weekends; and
- strategies for handling difficult school administrators.

The Schaumburg program asks a number of targeted questions about how the candidate would behave as an SRO, such as:

- How do you want students to perceive you, and how will that impact their feelings about police officers in general?
- In what ways do you think you can make yourself visible and available to students?
- As a teacher . . . , what techniques will you use to keep students interested?
- It is very difficult to get students to come to you; what would you do to build trust?
- What would you say to a staff member who came to you about a discipline issue, not a legal issue?

The Scottsdale, Arizona, Police Department requires candidates to **give a brief presentation** during the panel interview so members can assess the applicants' teaching ability. A chief of police in another department suggests that the presentation replicate a class for students and points out that the requirement not only provides a opportunity for screeners to see a candidate "in the raw" but to see if the applicant took the time to prepare for the presentation.

Sample Oral Panel Interview Questions

Marshall, Minnesota

Job Related Skills/Work Experience

1. Describe your education and training for this position.
2. How has your previous experience prepared you for this position?

Interpersonal Relations

3. Briefly describe an incident or project where you have had to work with others and explain how you contributed to the success of the incident or project.
4. As a School Resource Officer, how do you deal with High School aged people who are uncooperative or even argumentative?

Communications

5. Explain your experience in making verbal presentations to groups or individuals.
6. You're the first police officer permanently assigned to work within the Marshall School District. Some people aren't comfortable with the idea of having a police officer in the schools. How would you try to allay those concerns?

Information Analysis and Decision Making

7. A teacher believes that a student has committed a theft on school grounds and directs you to arrest the student. What would you do? Explain why.
8. Describe one of the more difficult work-related decisions that you have had to make and explain how you did it.

Community Policing

9. Describe Community Policing as you understand it.
10. Explain ways that community policing could be applied in the school environment.

Work Orientation

11. As a School Resource Officer, you will be working with little direct supervision. Discuss your experience working with little direct supervision.
12. As a School Resource Officer, your schedule will require you to work evenings and some weekends. Discuss your views on flexing your schedule.

Sioux Fall, South Dakota

1. Please discuss what you believe to be the duties and functions of the School Resource Officer.
2. Please discuss why you believe you would be a good School Resource Officer, particularly with middle school aged youth, and speak briefly about what you view your strengths and weaknesses to be.
3. How has your previous training, education and/or experiences prepared you for this position . . . ?
4. As a School Resource Officer, there are a lot of demands placed on your time both on-duty and off . . . You will be attending parent/teacher conferences, multiple organizational meetings, working sporting events, dances, concerts, proms, etc. Discuss how this might negatively impact you and/or your family personally.
5. As a School Resource Officer, there will be occasions where public presentations before large groups of people will be necessary. What experience or training have you had in the area of public speaking?
6. What do you feel are the major problems confronting our youth today?
7. Based on the previous question, what solutions might you have to offer and what direction should the schools, the police and the community be headed in to confront these problems that our youth are faced with?
8. Describe the concept of "Community Policing" as you understand it and how it could be applied to the school environment.
9. Some people (teachers, administration, parents, students) are not comfortable with the idea of having police officers in the schools. How would you try to ease those concerns?
10. The principal of your school, who you have an excellent working relationship with, advises you that a student has committed a theft on school grounds and directs you to arrest the student. What action would you take?

Several boards ask candidates **how they would respond to typical but problematic scenarios** (see the box "Sample Scenarios Oral Boards Present to Candidates). The board in Palm Beach County uses "targeted selection"—asking candidates not to suggest how they would respond to hypothetical scenarios but to report how they did respond to real life situations—for example, "Tell me about a time when you had a serious problem with a supervisor. What action did you take, and what happened as a result?"

Board members typically look beyond the candidate's answers to **examine closely how the person behaved during the panel interview**. For example, written instructions to board members in Marshall require panelists to assess each candidate's behavior in terms of:

- Oral Communication Skills (e.g., poor articulation, easily understood),
- Displayed Motivation (e.g., mainly looking for "day job"),
- Composure (e.g., fidgety, very calm and collected), and
- Appearance (e.g., underdressed, neat and well groomed).

Sample Scenarios Some Oral Boards Present to Candidates

John Morella, an SRO in West Orange, uses several scenarios when he serves on a panel, such as the following:

- A senior female student walks into your office and says that she is pregnant with her 25-year-old boyfriend's baby, wants an abortion, but does not want to tell her parents.
- A student comes up to you and says, "Jimmy is selling drugs out of his locker, and there are drugs in there right now."

The Oklahoma County Sheriff's Department has used the following scenarios:

- A child approaches you and tells you of a crime against them that implicates a school official. What is your response?
- An assault and battery occurs in your presence, but a school official intervenes and tells you that they will handle the situation in house. What is your response?
- You are contacted by a teacher who advises you that a student is making allegations of abuse against his or her parents. What are your responsibilities as the school resource officer, and what actions will you take?

Oral Boards Are Not Foolproof

A few supervisors expressed concerns about using oral boards.

- Captain Tim Carney, who oversees the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office's program, warns that "some officers do poorly on the oral board but end up as good SROs—and vice versa. One quiet candidate was overlooked twice, but the next time I talked in depth with his patrol supervisor, who said, 'This guy will run through a wall for you.' As a result, the panel accepted the officer and today principals love him—he's a local guy and dedicated."
- Similarly, Sergeant Roger Willey, who runs the Delaware State Police program, is not sure the oral board process is always effective because "some officers don't do well in this setting. It's similar to a promotion board, which is very nerve-wracking, so we may end up eliminating good candidates. To avoid this, we try to keep it relaxed and less stressful."

Coming to a Decision

Many programs use a formal scoring system for rating each candidate. For example, Chief Robert Yant in Marshall developed a detailed "School Resource Officer Oral Interview Rater's Guide" (see appendix A) for evaluating candidates' performance based on a 1-7 rating for each of 12 dimensions of the oral examination and a 1-4 rating for each of 4 dimensions of observed behavior (see above), for a total of 100 possible points.

The case studies at the end of the chapter describe the structured scoring systems that the Garner Police Department and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office use. Appendix B provides the complete Sarasota County Sheriff's Office scoring guidelines.

Assigning New SROs to Specific Schools

In many programs, because there is only one opening for an SRO at a given time, deciding which school a new SRO should be assigned to is not an issue. However, in some programs several new SROs must be placed among several schools. When there are openings available at more than one school in Sarasota County, panel members discuss which applicants would be best suited for each school and, in particular, for which grade level. In Stark County, after the panel interviews are complete and the SROs selected, the school superintendents represented on the panel discuss which candidates would be best for their schools. For example, some superintendents request deputies who live in their communities or have children in their schools because they feel these SROs will have "instant buy-in" from community members.

Training Panel Members

A few panel members reported that orienting board members to some of the subtleties of participating on an oral board could improve the screening process, especially for first-time panelists. Two sergeants in Sioux Falls attended a National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) training for program supervisors at which "we had the opportunity to do a 'mock' interview using as 'applicants' three people who were attending a NASRO basic course."

Involve Schools in Screening Candidates

Many programs have demonstrated the value of making sure that school administrators are active participants in the screening process.

Why Involve School Administrators

Police administrators and school administrators in programs that have involved school district and school-level administrators in the screening process report that ***the administrators' participation helps (1) match SROs properly with individual schools and (2) increase acceptance of the program and the SROs among school personnel.***

- In Lakewood, Colorado, Sergeant Patricia Heffner admitted that the police department had originally not been keen on inviting school personnel but sees the value now. "By participating, the school administrators are 'buying' into their SRO—and they have less room to complain if it does not end up working out."
- The memorandum of agreement signed by each local school board and the Stark County Sheriff's Office calls for "joint selection" of the SROs. The sheriff offered the school districts a significant role because the administrators had suspicions about the program—they were not sure they wanted a deputy in the schools because they were concerned it could be a negative experience. As a result, the sheriff wanted to take the initiative in giving them the opportunity to participate in decision making related to the program rather than dictate to them. A group of school administrators, alongside officials from the sheriff's department, interviewed each of the 14 candidates who applied for the newly created positions.
- Captain Curtis Main of the Boone Police Department said that school representatives involved in the screening process have raised issues the department representatives on the board did not consider. For example, they drew out from one candidate that he had refused to teach the D.A.R.E. curriculum because he did not believe in the program.

Ward Nelson, a middle school principal and coordinator of the Schaumburg program, believes that "It is critical to involve the schools in the screening because, if the department sends us someone, we still worry [after several years of working with well-qualified SROs] whether it will be the right type of person."

As suggested above, ***school administrators frequently want SROs with specific characteristics that they feel will make the officers most effective in their particular schools.***

- In collaboration with Major Rick Perez of the sheriff's office, each school superintendent in Stark County prepared his or her own written job description for the SRO for his or her schools. Perez keeps the descriptions on file in his office.
- The Plain View School District superintendent of schools in Oklahoma County who served as the school representative for officer screening and selection interviewed between 10-20 officers for the initial five slots. With so few adult role models for minority students in her district, she wanted at least one African-American or Hispanic officer placed there. She also believed it best to have one male and one female SRO available to her students.

Ways of Involving School Administrators

The most common way school administrators participate in the screening process is through the oral interview panel. A case study at the end of the chapter describes the Sarasota County's procedure for involving the school district in the panels' work. In a few programs, administrators also participate in developing the panels' screening criteria.

A sometimes contentious issue is ***whether schools should have veto power over which candidates are chosen.*** In most sites, the chief or sheriff maintains ultimate power over which officers or deputies will be accepted into the program. A West Orange high school principal contends, however, that, if the SRO program has goals beyond police suppression, principals should hold some veto power in hiring decisions. After all, he points out, the principal has daily responsibility for the welfare of all students with whom the officer will interact. Reflecting this position, school district panelists in Sarasota County may veto the appointment of a candidate. Similarly, school administrators in King County, Washington, can reject an officer whom the sheriff's department recommends because, according to the program coordinator, "If there is bad chemistry between an SRO and school staff, the program is doomed. We don't want to force an SRO down anyone's throat, so if a school doesn't want a particular officer, we find another candidate until we get one everyone agrees is a good fit." Occupying a middle ground, another program allows individual school principals to reject candidates for their schools but not for the program as a whole.

Implement Several Screening Methods

Some programs use multiple screening methods in an attempt to select the most qualified candidates as SROs. For example, the Boone Police Department requires the following steps:

- (1) a letter of intent to apply to the captain in charge of the program;
- (2) a review of the officer's past performance review;
- (3) a psychological exam if it has been more than three years since the last exam;
- (4) a discussion with the officer's current supervisor;
- (5) a review of this information by a management team member;
- (6) an interview with a management team;
- (7) a discussion about the candidate between the captain and the school superintendent and principals; and
- (8) an interview with the captain and school representatives during which any issues raised by the school representatives are addressed.

* * *

As illustrated in the case studies below, both the Garner, North Carolina, and Sarasota County, Florida, programs use multiple screening procedures.

- The Garner Police Department uses a four-stage process that includes a physical examination, written examination, oral interview panel, and the applicant's score on his or her two previous department appraisal periods.
- The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office's screening approach includes a highly structured oral interview panel with written questions and an established scoring procedure.

Case Study: Garner, North Carolina, Police Department (53 sworn)

The experience of the Garner Police Department, with only 53 sworn officers in a town of 20,000, suggests that even relatively small law enforcement agencies and jurisdictions can develop, document in writing, and implement a thorough screening process. The department also takes an unusual approach that requires applicants and screeners to avoid any contact before the oral interview.

The screening process in Garner begins with a memo of interest from the applicant and a letter of recommendation from his or her current supervisor. Applicants then go through a four-part screening process, each of which contributes a certain number of points to an applicant's score for a total of up to 325 points. As described below, the program gives each candidate a three-page set of instructions for how to prepare for each step in the screening process.

(1) Police Officer Physical Abilities Test (possible 25 points)

The preparation instructions given to candidates for the physical test informs them to start drinking at least 64 ounces of water per day two or three days before the test day and to warm up at least 3-5 minutes immediately before the test begins. Candidates earn points according to the total time it takes them to complete the test (based on standards established by the North Carolina Training and Standards Division), with final times in minutes and seconds subtracted from the maximum possible 25 points. For example, if the tests take them 8 minutes to complete, they earn 17 points (25-8). The tests—the same ones required for department applicants—range from running up stairs, to catching someone upright to prevent injury, to subduing a person resisting arrest.

(2) Written Exercise (possible 100 points)

Applicants review a 2-3-minute video depicting law enforcement dilemmas and are given a fixed amount of time to provide a hand-written narrative "story" solving them. An outside education consultant grades the papers based on 11 criteria, including proper punctuation and vocabulary, correct spelling and grammar, appropriate support and elaboration of the points being made, and logical presentation of ideas.

(3) Oral Interview Panel (possible 100 points)

Instructions to candidates tell them to be prepared to answer questions on some or all of seven topics, ranging from juvenile arrest, detention, and investigation procedures, to department policy and procedures related to SRO duties, to conflict management. A community panel consisting of the program supervisor, SROs, the principal of the school to which the new SRO will be assigned, and a parent of a child at the school interviews each candidate. The department's public information officer briefs the panelists beforehand and provides them with a list of questions to ask and instructions for scoring responses (see the box "The Garner Police Department's Interview Panel Questions"). Panel members rotate asking the questions.

Before a candidate appears before the panel, the program supervisor requires the applicant to sign a statement attesting that he or she has read the nine "Interview Guidelines" that explain the panel interview process, such as:

- Panel members may NOT [emphasis in the original] elaborate, provide clarification for or outline examples related to any question.
- Panel members may only repeat questions verbatim and only when asked by you. [emphasis in the original]
- The same answer cannot be given for more than one question.
- The interview is being recorded on video (to review candidate answers if necessary for scoring).

The Garner Police Department's Interview Panel Questions

- (1) Can you provide us with an example, while employed as a police officer, in which you worked to improve the quality of life for those in our community? (1) What was the situation, (2) what did you do, and (3) what was the outcome? (25 possible points)
- (2) Can you provide us with any life situation that illustrates your ability to resolve conflict effectively? (1) What was the situation, (2) what did you do, (3) what was the outcome? (25 points)
- (3) Can you tell us about a life situation you encountered which illustrates your ability to receive criticism constructively? (1) Why were you criticized? (2) What did you do about it? (3) What was the outcome? (25 points)
- (4) What have you done, if anything, to prepare for this assignment and why? (10 points)
- (5) Can you provide one example, as a police officer, that demonstrates your creativity in locating or providing needed resources? (15 points)

(4) Average of Previous Two Performance Appraisal Periods (possible 100 points)

Prior performance evaluations constitute nearly one-third of the total points a candidate can score. Garner police officers are evaluated annually on a point scale, with 100 a perfect score. The program averages the applicant's previous two evaluations so that, for example, if an officer scored an 80 and a 90, he or she would get 85 points toward the total SRO screening score.

The program uses the total scores to rank candidates. The chief makes the final selection. Candidates who earn more than 162 points and are not selected are placed on an eligibility list for the following year. The program provides applicants with their final screening results, as well as an analysis of their performance and strategies, so they can improve their performance in the future if they reapply.

Applicants and Panelists in Garner Are Not Allowed to Contact Each Other

The instructions for the screening process that the police department gives to all candidates prohibits them from seeking advice from anyone currently involved in the selection process, including program supervisors and the principal of the school with the vacancy. The department has candidates and panelists sign a statement confirming that the parties do not know each other. The department's purpose in making this requirement is to maintain the integrity and objectivity of the selection process.

Case Study: Sarasota County, Florida, Sheriff's Department (500 sworn)

While the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office SRO program does not use written criteria for screening SRO candidates, in other respects the program uses a comprehensive procedure for making sure that it selects well-qualified officers as SROs.

Screening Criteria

According to the contract between the sheriff's office and the school district, SRO applicants must volunteer for the position, preferably have at least three years of law enforcement experience, and have an Associate of Arts or Science degree or the equivalent in credit hours. **A Bachelor of Arts degree is preferred.** (In the 1980s, the program required candidates to have a B.A. degree so they could be on an equal footing with teachers and administrators, but the requirement was dropped because not enough candidates had the degree.)

Panelists who serve on the oral board that screens candidates (see below) apply their own individual (and unwritten) criteria to the selection process.

- Captain Tim Carney, the youth services bureau commander, who serves on all panels, looks especially for the following characteristics:
 - ability to work with kids;
 - personality—adaptability to the principal, ability to be diplomatic—"you're working for two bosses"; and
 - understanding the triad concept—counseling and teaching as well as law enforcement.
- A high school principal, Daniel Parrett, who has served on several panels, uses the following criteria:
 - can get along with students—"not Sergeant Rock who stays in his office or on a pedestal looking down on people";
 - someone who will participate with kids and go into classes; and
 - someone who can help him "like a locker room lawyer."
- An elementary school principal, Christopher Renouf, who has served on two panels looks for:
 - flexibility—the ability to switch from doing one thing to another, "especially at the elementary level where you have to keep stopping what you're doing to attend to something else";
 - integrity/honesty/trustworthiness—"walking the walk—if you preach to kids, you have to role model what you preach with them and with parents—you have to be a very ethical, moral person"; and
 - dependability—"kids want to see that the SRO will be there regularly."

Panel members also consider whether applicants took the initiative to shadow any SROs on their own. According to one of the three program supervisors, Detective Sergeant Tim Enos, "I check to see if applicants asked if they might spend a half day or day before the oral board shadowing an SRO to see what the job entails—if they did, this suggests a level of commitment to the position." On one occasion, after the last candidate had been interviewed, Enos reported that one applicant had taken the initiative to visit three schools to shadow their SROs. The candidate also came to the office to talk about the position with the captain. Shadowing turns out to be a useful screening method. "Some applicants," Enos says, "drop their application after shadowing shows them the job isn't for them." Enos calls the applicants' supervisors to confirm that they have a good record and would be effective as SROs, and reports what he learns to the panel.

Screening Process

The agreement between the sheriff's office and the school board **requires the superintendent of schools and the sheriff's office to appoint two members each to a School Resource Officer Personnel Board** "which shall have as its sole function the recruitment, interviewing and evaluation of School Resource Officers." As openings occur, the bureau assembles a board that includes the principal or assistant principal of the school with the vacancy, the superintendent of student services, one or more of the three program supervisors, and the youth services bureau commander, Captain Tim Carney.

Before each interview, one of the sergeants provides an overview of the candidate's history with the department. Then the applicant comes in. One panelist asks the applicant the first of ten written questions (see the box "Panel Members in Sarasota County Ask Candidates 10 Questions") and the applicant answers; another panelist asks the second question—and the applicant answers that question; and so on until all the questions have been asked. (Occasionally, a panel member asks a question not on the written list, usually as a follow-up to something the candidate has said.) The applicant is then asked if he or she has anything else to contribute and leaves. Panel members take three or four minutes to rate in writing the candidate's answer to each question on a scale from one to four (appendix B provides a copy of the Evaluation & Scoring Guidelines). The entire process takes about 25 minutes. Then the sergeant gives a brief overview of the second candidate, and the process is repeated.

Panel Members in Sarasota County Ask Candidates 10 Questions

1. Why are you interested in a Youth Service Bureau [i.e., SRO] position?
2. What do you think the role of a School Resource Officer is?
3. What are you looking for in a job?
4. The Youth Service Bureau receives many after hours and weekend assignments. Would you be willing to schedule your time to assist with these events?*
5. How were you different than most of your co-workers?
6. What words or phrase would your last supervisor use to describe you?
7. Describe your best achievement and how you accomplished it.
 - What was the achievement?
 - How did you go about it?
 - How much effort did you put in?
 - What obstacles did you encounter?
 - How did you overcome them?
 - What was the result?
8. Describe the biggest project that you had to see through from beginning to end
 - How did you coordinate the necessary activities?
 - How did you monitor progress?
 - What obstacles did you encounter?
 - How did you overcome them?
9. What is your experience in regard to teaching or lecturing in front of children and adults?
10. Please give us a brief overview of yourself and your career.

* A few years ago, the program changed some of the questions. In the past, the board focused on the applicants' interest in kids, but supervisors saw the need to make sure they accepted only applicants who were willing to work overtime for the program. To revise the questions, the supervisors worked with the sheriff's office human resources department, which had recently improved the questions asked of people applying to be correctional officers with the department.

Panel members do not vote but instead read their ratings and then discuss the applicants' qualifications. They usually reach a consensus on the best candidate(s). At the end of one board meeting, panelists concluded that some candidates:

- were objectively more qualified than others, for example:
 - they had been working with kids in some fashion even though they were patrol deputies, or
 - they had taught school in a previous career;
- appeared more motivated and enthusiastic than the others, for example:
 - they did not appear to simply want to get out of their current posting, or
 - they seemed to express a genuine interest in the work of an SRO;
- had a better demeanor than the others, for example:
 - they did not take for granted that they would get the position, or
 - they made a strong effort to try to present themselves as highly qualified;
- answered the questions better than the others, for example:
 - Question: "What do you think the role of a School Resource Officer is?"
 - Answer: "You have to check your macho image at the door [of the school] and do whatever it takes [to help the kids—which the candidate then followed—by giving examples of what SROs need to do for kids]."

When there are openings available at more than one school, panel members discuss which applicants are best suited for which grade level.

Both the sheriff's office and school district panelists may veto the selection of a candidate. According to Robyn Marinelli, the school district supervisor of student services who has attended almost every oral panel, "School representatives have veto power because otherwise the program would not work." There have been instances in which a principal has vetoed an SRO for his or her school. On one occasion a high school principal did not have a good feeling about an officer, but there were always other acceptable candidates competing for the position.

Appendix A

Marshall, Minnesota, Police Department Oral Interview Rater's Guide

Marshall Police Department

School Resource Officer Oral Interview Rater's Guide - 1999



MPD Oral Interview Rater's Guide - 1999

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide instructions and general rating guidelines for the completion of an oral interview for the assignment as School Resource Officer

The oral interview process is designed to assess job-related skills necessary to perform successfully in the position of School Resource Officer

The Oral Interview panel is responsible for assessing each candidate's expertise pertinent to the duties and responsibilities of a Police Officer assigned to the position of School Resource Officer. The responsibility involves coordinating the participation of the applicant in the interview situation, objectively presenting question and/ or follow-up questions, and fairly evaluating each candidate's performance in comparison to the rating areas identified as important for successful job performance.

During an interview session, you should present a question and/or follow-up questions to an applicant, listen to the applicant's responses, and take notes, which will assist you in evaluating the applicant's overall performance. The evaluation process will be based on a set of personal characteristics dimensions that have been developed based on the duties of a School Resource Officer.

Evaluating the performance of candidates during this interview consists of several related areas. It is suggested that you look at the following areas:

1. **Observe the behavior of the candidate** – This activity includes:
 - Watching the actions of the candidate;
 - interacting with the candidate; and
 - listening to the candidate.
2. **Record critical behaviors** – Take notes in the space provided on the interview form concerning the behavior you observe, including:
 - what and how the candidate acts, or fails to act, during the examination session; and
 - what the candidate says, or fails to say, during the session.
3. **Connect behavior to dimensions** – Connect critical behaviors to one or more of the personal dimensions included in this document. This activity includes:
 - Sorting your observations by relevant dimension(s), and
 - relating each observation to the descriptive information contained in the rating scale for a given dimension.
4. **Evaluate the candidate's performance** – based on your assessment of the candidate's behavior, assign a rating of 1 to 7 on each dimension of the oral examination. This comes to a maximum of 84 points. Assign a rating of 1 to 4 for each of the four observed dimensions of the examination. This comes to a maximum of 16 points. The maximum number of points available per candidate is 100 points.

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SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

The information presented by the applicant and his/her responses to your follow-up questions will provide the basis for your evaluation of a given applicant's skills and the potential success as a School Resource Officer.

The evaluation dimensions relevant to the assignment as School Resource Officer are presented in the following pages. Included in each dimension is a descriptive rating scale which has a range of one (1) to seven (7) possible points with rating information presented for high (7-6), medium (5-3), and low (2-1) point groupings. Within each of these groupings specific point values should be considered based the chart provided at the end of these instructions.

Summary

As you observe and evaluate the performance of each applicant, remember these important points:

1. It isn't unusual for an applicant to do well on one portion of the examination and poorly on another. You must be careful not to rate a candidate too high or too low overall based on his or her performance related to one specific situation or question. Observe the applicant's responses to each situation independently, but **synthesize your observations to rate overall performance on a particular dimension.**
2. Candidate responses should be rated objectively. Do not allow for subjective factors (i.e. past association, appearance, attempts to infer or perceive job motivations, etc.) to influence your job ratings.

Each rater will provide an individual assessment of the applicant's performance on all dimensions. Individual assessments will then be averaged across the panel to provide an overall rating for each dimension.

There will be a discussion of the ratings of each candidate at the end of the oral examinations.

If there is a difference of more than 2 points between raters on a given dimension, panel members may compare their ratings and then arrive at a consensus rating. A total rating will then be calculated by adding all average/consensus ratings. Individual and overall ratings will be recorded on the forms provided.

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SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

Rating Scale Information

Each dimension rating scale has a range of one (1) to seven (7) possible points with rating information presented for high (7-6), medium (5-3), and low (2-1) point categories. Within each category, specific point values should be considered in accordance with the descriptions presented below.

High Range

- 7 (Excellent) Candidate appears to possess a **very high level** of expertise on the overall dimension and all associated job behaviors and characteristics.
- 6 (Highly Preferred) Candidate appears to possess a **high level** of expertise on the overall dimension, or a very high level on a moderate portion of the associated job behaviors and characteristics.

Medium Range

- 5 (Good) Candidate appears to possess a **more than adequate** level of expertise on the overall dimensions or a high level on a moderate portion of the associated job behaviors and characteristics.
- 4 (Acceptable) Candidate appears to possess an **adequate level** of expertise on the overall dimensions or a more than adequate level on a moderate portion of the associated job behaviors and characteristics.
- 3 (Marginal) Candidate appears to possess **minimal** expertise on the overall dimension, or an adequate level of very few of the associated job behaviors and characteristics.

Low Range

- 2 (Poor) Candidate appears to be **deficient** with respect to many of the job behaviors and characteristics associated with this dimension.
- 1 (Unacceptable) Candidate appears to be **totally unacceptable** on this dimension or there is **no observable performance** which applies to this dimension.

MPD School Resource Officer Oral Interview Questions - 1999
Applicant's Name _____ **Rater's Initials** _____

CATEGORY A -- Job Related Skills/Work Experience

This dimension focuses on demonstrated knowledge, skills and/or abilities relevant to the technical areas of job responsibility. This dimension includes the skill in applying such knowledge to operational situations. Indication of such knowledge, skills and abilities include: Has similar work been done in the past. Shows knowledge of tasks/skills relevant to the assignment of School Resource Officer.

1. Describe your education and training for this position. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)
2. How has your previous experience prepared you for this position. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)

CATEGORY B -- Interpersonal Relations

This dimension focuses on skills in developing and maintaining positive and cooperative relationships with others. Indications of this include: Describes effective working relationships and cooperation with others. Describes consideration for the needs and concerns of others.

3. Briefly describe an incident or project where you have had to work with others and explain how you contributed to the success of the incident or project. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)
4. As a School Resource Officer, how do you deal with High School aged people who are uncooperative or even argumentative? (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)

CATEGORY C -- Communications

This dimension focuses on oral communication skills and experience. Examples of relevant skill descriptions are provided below.

EXAMPLES OF LOW RATED RESPONSES:

- + demonstrated difficulty understanding the questions
- + gave consistently vague answers
- + have had little public speaking experiences

EXAMPLES OF HIGH RATED RESPONSES:

- + readily understood the questions
- + responses were logically organized
- + has had public speaking experience

5. Explain your experience in making verbal presentations to groups or individuals? (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)
6. You're the first police officer permanently assigned to work within the Marshall School District. Some people aren't comfortable with the idea of having a police officer in the schools. How would you try to allay those concerns? (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)

MPD School Resource Officer Oral Interview Questions - 1999
Applicant's Name _____ **Rater's Initials** _____

CATEGORY D -- Information Analysis & Decision-Making

This dimension focuses on processing and analyzing information to effectively identify and define problems, establish and maintain work priorities, or make decisions. Indications of such skills include: Recognizing and responding appropriately to problems and making timely, sound decisions even under pressure and uncertainty. Considering problem alternatives and making logical decisions.

7. A teacher believes that a student has committed a theft on school grounds and directs you to arrest the student. What would you do? Explain why. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)
8. Describe one of the more difficult work-related decisions that you have had to make and explain how you did it. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)

CATEGORY E -- Community Policing

Policing today increasingly involves a community-policing framework, such as problem solving and interaction with broad elements of the community. However community policing does not eliminate enforcement as a significant tool for accomplishing police goals. Indications of such skills and understandings include: Setting priorities and handling tasks in order of priority. Working with elements of the community outside of law enforcement to accomplish policing goals.

9. Describe Community Policing as you understand it. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)
10. Explain ways that community policing could be applied in the school environment. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)

CATEGORY F -- Work Orientation

This dimension focuses on characteristics that are important for effective job performance. Indications of these characteristics include: Being receptive to personally maintain a strong work ethic. Checking work for errors and making necessary corrections. Willingness to work evenings and weekends without overtime.

11. As a School Resource Officer you will be working with little direct supervision. Discuss your experience working with little direct supervision. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)
12. As a School Resource Officer your schedule will require you to work evenings and some weekends. Discuss your views on flexing your schedule. (1 2 3 4 5 6 7)

MPD School Resource Officer Oral Interview Questions - 1999
Applicant's Name _____ **Rater's Initials** _____

CATEGORY G -- OBSERVED CANDIDATES BEHAVIOR AND APPEARANCE

Rate each candidate accordingly to the following characteristics on a 1 to 4 scale.

ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- 1 _____ Vague, brief responses. Communication is poorly articulated.
- 2 _____ Adequate articulation, comprehension and fluency.
- 3 _____ Easily understood, speaks clearly and concisely
- 4 _____ Excellent verbal communications, very well-organized

DISPLAYED MOTIVATION

- 1 _____ Minimal interest in the assignment as School Resource Officer
- 2 _____ Good desire to work, but mainly looking for a "day-job"
- 3 _____ Solid interest in the position demonstrated, ask questions
- 4 _____ Excellent motivation, very much indicates wanting to be a School Resource Officer

COMPOSURE

- 1 _____ Nervous, "fidgety" and appears ill at ease
- 2 _____ Normal composure for a stressful situation
- 3 _____ Very good composure; may have been slightly nervous at the beginning
- 4 _____ Very calm and collected, demonstrated no visible nervousness and may have used humor appropriately

APPEARANCE

- 1 _____ Careless about personal appearance
- 2 _____ Acceptable personal appearance, somewhat "under-dressed" for an interview
- 3 _____ Very good personal appearance, appropriate for an interview
- 4 _____ Very neat and well groomed, "professional" appearance

MPD Oral Interview Summary Rating - 1999
SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

INTERVIEW PANEL MEMBERS

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

APPLICANT: _____

DATE: _____

Appendix B

Sarasota County, Florida, Sheriff's Office Guidelines for Scoring Candidates

SARASOTA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU ORAL BOARDS

APPLICANT NAME:

DATE OF ORAL BOARD:

CERTIFIED: YES ☐ NO ☐ **EXPERIENCED:** YES ☐ NO ☐

EVALUATION & SCORING GUIDELINES & QUESTIONS

Revised August 15, 2003

UNACCEPTABLE (1-6)	Unable to communicate in an organized, concise manner. Avoided the main aspect of the question and gave a very general answer. Displayed little interest and appeared threatened or significantly uncomfortable during the oral board.
ACCEPTABLE (7-8)	Communicated in a logical manner. Addressed the specific issue of the questions in an acceptable manner. Displayed interest appeared comfortable relating to the oral board.
SUPERIOR (9-10)	Communicated in a clear, concise, courteous and professional manner. Addressed questions specifically with sincerity and credibility. Displayed active interest and confidence while relating to the oral board.

Interviewer Instructions: Each interviewer chooses 3 questions. All applicants must be asked to respond to the same questions. Score the applicant following the above guidelines by circling the appropriate score. Include any notes related to the applicants answer on the lines provided.

1. Why are you interested in a Youth Services Bureau position?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. What do you think the role of a School Resource Officer is?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. What are you looking for in a job?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. The Youth Service Bureau receives many after hours and weekend assignments. Would you be willing to schedule your time to assist with these events?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. How were you different than most of your co-workers?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. What words or phrase would your last supervisor use to describe you?
Why?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Describe your best achievement and how you accomplished it.

- What was the achievement?
- How did you go about it?
- How much effort did you put in?
- What obstacles did you encounter?
- How did you overcome them?
- What was the result?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Describe the biggest project that you had to see through from beginning to end.

- How did you coordinate necessary activities?
- How did you monitor progress?
- What obstacles did you encounter?
- How did you overcome them?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. What is your experience in regard to teaching or lecturing in front of children and adults?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Please give us a brief overview of your self and your career?

SCORE: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

TOTAL SCORE: _____

SIGNATURE OF INTERVIEWER DATE

